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SUBJECT: GUINEA-BISSAU ASSASSINATIONS UPDATE MARCH 5

Classified By: Classified by AMB Marcia Bernicat for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: According to the Bissau-Guinean ambassador to Senegal, drug traffickers or, perhaps, Guinea Conakry had a hand in the assassination of Chief of Staff General Tagme Na Wai. It is clear that Mansoa battalion commander, Antonio Nije, is responsible for killing President Joao Bernardo Vieira. Just before the assassination of Na Wai, Vieira met with the general and other senior officers to announce that he was dismissing Na Wai from his role as chief of staff, which prompted Na Wai to remark that Vieira was gunning for him. Drug money is likely to flood into the country during the presidential election campaign. Potential presidential candidate Enrique Rosa, a former interim-president, would be a good leader for the country who could work well with the current prime minister. END SUMMARY.

Are Outside Forces Responsible for Killing Military Chief?

¶2. (C) On March 4, after signing the condolence book for the deaths of Vieira and Na Wai, Ambassador Bernicat met with her Bissau-Guinean counterpart, Fali Embalo. Embalo opined that outside forces -- perhaps narcotics traffickers, perhaps unnamed parties from Guinea Conakry -- are most likely responsible for the assassination of Chief-of-Staff General Tagme Na Wai. According to Embalo, the remote detonator used to set off the explosives that killed Na Wai are not part of Bissau-Guinean military's armaments (Comment: Post OSC Chief also believes such a device is beyond the technical capability of the Bissau-Guinean armed forces).

It is Clear Who Killed Vieira

¶3. (C) Embalo said he had spoken with Vieira shortly after the assassination of Na Wai, at approximately 10:30 PM local time, and asked the President about his security; the President replied that he was safe and that the military was taking the necessary precautions to protect him, including setting up road blocks. He believed this in spite of the apparent fact that Vieira apparently had just announced to Na Wai earlier in the evening that he was dismissing the general from his position as chief of staff, to which Na Wai reacted by saying that Vieira was coming after him. (Comment: According to another source, President Vieira met with the Minister of Defense and the chiefs of staff of the armed services to assure them that he was not involved in the assassination of Na Wai. Reportedly, the President left that meeting convinced he had persuaded the generals, which could explain why he remained in his home with his wife in the hours after the death of Na Wai. End comment.)

¶4. (C) According to Embalo, Antonio Nije, the commander of the army battalion in Mansoa, is directly implicated in the

assassination of Vieira. The Bissau-Guinean ambassador claimed that Nije ordered his men to go to Bissau and to attack the President. Upon arriving at the President's house, several of his army guards apparently left, while others remained and joined the mutinous soldiers in attacking the President. Embalo said that several people were in the house when the soldiers confronted Vieira. When the soldiers threatened the First Lady, Vieira told them to leave her because their fight was with him. One of the mutinous officers agreed and ordered the president's wife, Isabella, into another room of the house from where she heard her husband being beaten and then shot. Then Mrs. Vieira and the presidential advisers that were present were allowed to leave, apparently. When asked about Naval Captain and self-proclaimed military spokesperson/chief-of-staff Zamora Induta, Embalo said that Induta had implicated himself in the death of Vieira at a minimum indirectly and that he had been reckless to announce that Vieira was responsible for the death of Na Wai.

15. (C) When asked if the GOGB could make use of investigative assistance, Embalo said his government would welcome it, insisting that the guilty parties needed to be apprehended and prosecuted. He said that it was clear who was responsible and there are eye witnesses to the crime who are now in hiding.

Presidential Elections

16. (SBU) Embalo reported that the government of Portugal and the European Union (EU) have offered to help pay for the

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upcoming presidential elections, which are scheduled to take place 60 days after the National Assembly president, Raimundo Pereira, assumes the office of interim-president, as per the constitution. However, he said the EU is "drained" having just spent considerable money supporting the November 2008 legislative elections.

17. (C) The Bissau-Guinean ambassador expressed concern that drug money would flood the country during the campaign for the presidency as it did during the legislative elections. Although, he conceded that the alleged use of drug money by President Vieira's Party for Independence and Development (PRID) did not seem to have an impact on the legislative elections, given that PRID only won two of the 100 seats.

18. (C) Embalo commented that one of the possible presidential candidates, Enrique Rosa, who served as interim-president following the 1998 civil war, would be a good leader for the country. While he did not rule out the possibility that Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior would run for president himself, Embalo said the Rosa and Gome would make a good team because the two get along and know each other well. He said that Rosa, a former businessman like Gomes, did a good job running the country while interim-president and that he was respected for the same reasons as Gomes, being seen as competent and uncorrupt. In a separate conversation, the Cape Verdean ambassador also expressed admiration for Rosa.

19. COMMENT: Ambassador Embalo's comments underscore that the deaths of Vieira and Na Wai, while tragic, could represent a window of opportunity for the country. While the victory of Gomes' African Independence Party for Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in November was a positive step for the country, the personal enmity between Vieira and Gomes and their disagreements regarding the proper role and division of power between the offices of the president and prime minister created unnecessary conflict. This conflict had the potential of causing gridlock that would block much need security sector and public sector reform. While the assassination itself is a source of instability in the short term and it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty

how the situation will develop in Guinea-Bissau in the next few weeks, the death of Vieira and Na Wai removes two conflicting actors and potential sources of instability from the country's leadership dynamic and could give Gomes the breathing room he needs to establish civilian control over the armed forces and to move forward on reforms. END
COMMENT.
BERNICAT